

## SUN TZU: THEORIST FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

BY

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**SUN TZU: THEORIST FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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## SUN TZU: THEORIST FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

War is a matter of vital importance to the State: the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.

—Sun Tzu  
*The Art of War*

What strategic theory and theorist should the United States Military adopt to conduct war in the twenty-first century? Senior leaders are discussing this question in the hallways of the White House and Pentagon. In an environment in which the United States dominates the world stage, theorists argue that future wars involving our great military powers will be unbalanced or asymmetrical. If current and future adversaries perform unconventional and asymmetric warfare, the United States must reexamine its war theory, which impacts our conduct of warfare. Therefore, theories provide ways to examine issues; they offer insight into problem solving regarding wars and the use of military force. This Strategic Research Paper proposes that Sun Tzu's indirect or battle avoidance theory is most relevant to twenty-first century United States strategy. It elaborates on his theory and explains why his ideas are so viable and applicable to the current strategic environment. To successfully counter national security threats, twenty-first century United States strategists should rely on Sun Tzu as their primary theorist. His writings are as pertinent today as they were thousands of years ago.

Modern war theories are based on many factors: culture, technology, environmental issues and lessons learned by observing the conduct of warfare. As history progresses, the core tenants of war theory continue to draw from the human dimensions of armed conflict. War is indisputably fought by human beings and not by technology. After thousands of years, human nature remains essentially unchanged.

The core of war theory is based on human values and human behavior. Therefore, prevention of any armed conflict tends to derive first from human nature, as is evident in the late twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first century. Consider Operation Enduring Freedom: America's first conflict of the twenty-first century "featured advanced Special Operation Soldiers riding horses into battle with their Afghanistan allies much like the days of old - albeit supported by F-16s instead of archers."<sup>1</sup> Despite the time and place, the soldier within us remains the same. All warriors perform in accordance with a theory of war that follows the principles of the ages. This Strategic Research Paper argues that no one has better captured the theory of warfare than Sun Tzu.

### Historic Overview

The authorship of *The Art of War* is attributed to a Chinese general named Sun Tzu. Over 2500 years ago, he was a great military strategist and general for King Helu of the Wu State of ancient China. Although there are no precise records of Sun Tzu's life, historians have discovered a "record of his life written by a Sima Quian – biographer in the second century BC. Sun Tzu is believed to have been born in 544 BC under the name of Sun Wu, in the state of Qi in ancient China. His family was a member of the Shi Class, an ancient class of aristocrats."<sup>2</sup> Historians believe *The Art of War* was written "during the so called Warring States period on ancient China."<sup>3</sup>

Much controversy surrounds the writing of *The Art of War*. Some historians challenge the validity of the single authorship, contending that several people wrote it. Others debate whether Sun Tzu was actually a historic figure or simply a mythical character. Regardless, *The Art of War* is generally acknowledged as a time-honored classic on theory of warfare and strategy. Although war during Sun Tzu's time was

obviously more primitive than contemporary warfare in terms of technology, equipment, and capabilities; Sun Tzu and current strategist have common interest in soldiers, national goals, leadership, and strategy. Sun Tzu's work has received attention from scholars, strategists and soldiers over the centuries. According to historians, "Sun Tzu's philosophies were more about how to avoid war while still maintaining control over an enemy in tight situations than war itself."<sup>4</sup> It continues to be a valuable reference work on conducting war.

Sun Tzu's work had been rewritten and further interpreted by several military commanders, strategists, and scholars. "Not until the late eighteenth century, however, was it introduced to the Western world. In 1782, French Jesuit Jean Joseph Marie Amiot translated *The Art of War* into a European language. Since then, *The Art of War* has been translated into Russian, German, and English."<sup>5</sup>

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* has influenced several military professionals and leaders. "During the Persian Gulf War in the 1990, General Norman Schwarzkopf Jr practiced Sun Tzu's principles of deception, speed, and attacking the enemy's weakness. This was the reward for developing an awareness and understanding of Sun Tzu's concepts."<sup>6</sup> In his autobiography, General Tommy Franks stated "I had read about both war and peace: the accumulated wisdom of Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Bertram Russell and Gandhi."<sup>7</sup> Sun Tzu's theories have influenced war planners of Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Liddell Hart, a great British strategist, described Sun Tzu as "the most concentrated essence of wisdom on the conduct of war"<sup>8</sup> He goes on to assert that "only Clausewitz is comparable; but the clarity of Sun Tzu's thought could have corrected the obscurity of Clausewitz."<sup>9</sup> Sun Tzu



was not interested in advising elaborate, complex techniques to wage war. Sun Tzu's primary purpose was to "develop systematic treatise to guide rulers and generals in the intelligent prosecution of successful war."<sup>10</sup> Liddell Hart emphasizes that Sun Tzu's theories "are the best short introduction to the study of warfare, and no less valuable for constant reference in extending study of the subject."<sup>11</sup> Liddell Hart's own philosophy affirms Sun Tzu's emphasis on doing the unexpected and adopting the indirect approach in strategy.

Sun Tzu's favored ideas continue to survive today because of the on-going applicability of his timeless theories based on his objective analysis of military issues. Further, his war theory is also "very popular with corporate executives from various businesses, political campaign planners, attorneys, and coaches of team sports."<sup>12</sup> Sun Tzu's theories provide a roadmap for achieving success, regardless of the competitive venue. It is required reading for those interested in gaining further understanding of grand strategy, in accomplishing goals, in creating better morale within organizations and achieving success or victory while preserving your resources – relying on the most proximate orthodox or unorthodox means available.

### Strategic Environment

As the United States faces the realities of the new millennium, the likelihood of conflicts between nations and non-state actors poses the greatest current challenge. Wealth, power, and technology are creating destabilizing imbalances throughout different regions and countries. Changes across the gamut of information, politics, economics, and military forces contribute to these irregular conditions.

There is a great deal of speculation about what the world will be like in the future. This speculation involves all elements of all national power – diplomatic, informational,

military, and economic (DIME). The most common theme among futurists is that the world is entering a time of uncertainty beyond that which the United States has ever known. Most agree there will be an increase in the number of rogue states, non-state actors and terrorist organizations – all of which threaten continuous conflict throughout the world. The potential for simultaneous conflict, such as what we are currently experiencing in Iraq and Afghanistan, anywhere in the world at varying levels of intensity and at differing national or sub-national levels remains high. Most analysts predict such conflicts will lean more toward an asymmetrical warfare environment.

Since the earliest United States conflicts, strategists attempted to develop asymmetric warfare techniques to counter the enemy. After the employment of the first tank on the battlefield during World War I, nations not only developed their own tanks for symmetric warfare but they also created anti-tank weapons for asymmetric warfare. Discussions today on asymmetrical warfare tend to focus on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and terrorism. Proliferation of WMD capability will grow in rogue states, non-state actors and terrorist organizations. No one expects an adversary to challenge the United States in a massive, force-on-force, conventional war. The United States will need to find ways to counter non-conventional threats while remaining a super power.

Currently, the worldwide global environment is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). These conditions are similar to those in Sun Tzu's time period. Twenty-first century warfare "uses all available networks- political, economic, social and military, to convince the enemy's leadership their strategic goals are either unattainable or too costly to achieve."<sup>13</sup> Sun Tzu's theory of war addresses this kind of environment.

Sun Tzu's battle avoidance theory was formulated to achieve victory by no or limited conflict in this unpredictable environment.

The current strategic environment – states verses rogue states, rebels, and piracy - resembles that of China a thousands years ago. The principal of war as well as the strategy of warfare that supported Sun Tzu remains viable and consistent with the modern warfare theory of the twenty-first century. There is no indication these conflicts will end or that this environment will change. Strategists must continue evaluating these conditions to plan for effective responses. Sun Tzu provides unsurpassed guidance for the best response under these conditions.

### Sun Tzu's War Theory

*Strategy.* Definitions of strategy can vary depending on the source an individual examines. Strategy is far from easy. Understanding the underlying theory of strategy enables us to engage its complexity by understanding its inherent logic. Strategy is defined in Joint Publication 1-02 as “the art and science of developing and employing instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national and/or multinational objectives.”<sup>14</sup>

Strategy is comprised of three balanced and integrated concepts – ends, ways, and means, like a three legs supporting a stool. Ends are the overall goals of the strategy - the objectives the strategy is crafted to achieve. Ways are the methods and concept that enable parties to achieve its strategic goals. Specification of ways indicates how the party will achieve strategic goals. The last leg of the strategy concept is the means; they identify the resources required to fulfill the concepts expressed in ways. Strategy provides “direction for the state, seeking to maximize positive outcomes

and minimize negative outcomes, as the state moves through a complex and rapidly changing environment.”<sup>15</sup>

Sun Tzu was fully aware of the importance of clear, understandable guidance or strategy. He provides a concise collection of methods needed to succeed in this arena. Sun Tzu believed strategy represents a calculation or estimate of objectives, plans, and resources - devised within reasonable limits - to create more favorable outcomes than might otherwise be arrived at by chance or at the hands of others. If calculations or estimates indicate a plan is not feasible or too risky, then the decision-maker should not take any actions before all such issues are properly resolved. If not, the decision-maker will put his forces in jeopardy and potentially ruin the nation.

If the goals of a nation are to survive and prosper, then what is the objective of its strategy? Sun Tzu offers that “your aim must be to take “All-under-Heaven” intact. Thus, your troops are not worn out and your gains will be complete. This is the art of offensive strategy.”<sup>16</sup> Sun Tzu recognized that in order to achieve established objectives, strategists must understand both warfare and diplomacy. He advocates a holistic view of strategy. Sun Tzu goes beyond domestic, military, and foreign policy to advise strategists on “state craft”. State craft “entails achieving one’s objective in peace and war – a country’s objective in the relationship between states and the wise use of alliance.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, he stresses the proper use and allocation of resources to accomplish aims. State craft includes the use of political, economic, psychological, moral, and military means to achieve objectives. State craft requires “looking beyond conflict to its resolution, ensuring a peace and system of interstate relationship more profitable to one’s nation.”<sup>18</sup> A great case study providing a poor example of the

execution of this philosophy is the transition into Phase IV of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. An argument can be made that the Bush Administration failed to provide a clear strategy and did not integrate the elements of soft power into the strategy to achieve the nation's goals in Iraq. This failure led to future issues which prevented the United States military from withdrawing after the conflict ended. Indeed, this failure enables an insurgency to develop and has protracted the conflict indefinitely.

Sun Tzu advises "first attack the enemy's strategy, then his alliance, next his army and last his cities."<sup>19</sup> He emphasized the value of out-thinking the enemy. He stressed the importance of fighting the enemy on your own conditions, not his. Sun Tzu examines alternative ways of achieving victory instead of by brute force alone. Today, these other methods constitute what is known as 'soft' power - diplomatic, informational, military and economic.

Sun Tzu offers many maxims regarding offensive strategy, maneuver, limited war, attack by fire, terrain and distraction/decision forces (Chi and Cheng). Sun Tzu advises leaders to think in terms of options and to act irregularly while countering threats such as terrorists and insurgents. He advocates luring the enemy to the battlefield by enticing him with the illusion of an opportunity he cannot refuse. Using his theory of war and strategy, the United States can create an environment favorable to the United States and not the enemy.

Effective strategy eliminates gaps between ends, ways and means. It assesses the environment and develops objectives, concepts, and resources required to accomplish the goals established by the decision-maker. Thus a great strategy seeks to

influence and shape the environment instead of reacting to it. Sun Tzu understood this concept very well. His theory on strategy is as valid today as it was 2,500 years ago.

*Warfare.* In the current environment, our national security depends on our ability to counter various threats. Sun Tzu's theory applies to all levels of war- tactical, operational, and strategic. He offers simple but practical maxims for commanders on the ground as well as for strategic leaders located in a situational room discussing strategic objectives, the use of military forces, and long-term impacts of war.

Sun Tzu claims that "[w]ar is a matter of vital importance to the State: the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied."<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, leaders must examine carefully the reasons to wage war. War is not to be taken lightly; it must be used as a last resort. Leaders must exhaust all elements of soft power before deciding to wage war.

Once a nation goes to war, however, "victory is the main object in war."<sup>21</sup> Sun Tzu stresses winning, but does not advocate sacrificing human life or exhausting the nation's treasury to gain victory. His primary goal is to defeat the enemy without fighting him. If this is not possible, then the nation should wage a quick and flexible war, relying heavily on deception and intelligence. According to Sun Tzu, "the proper use of these principles will allow the wise commander to win."<sup>22</sup> Sun Tzu's principles admirably focus on victory with the least damage and swiftest resolution.

Sun Tzu advises against a protracted war because a nation stands a chance of exhausting its resources, decreasing the people's support and decreasing its military power which could lead to the nation's demise. Sun Tzu believes "when the army engages in a protracted campaign, the resources of the state will be sacrificed. For

there have never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.”<sup>23</sup> He is respectful of war’s overwhelming power and its ability to generate unforeseen circumstances. Warfare should be executed only when a leader knows and understands how it can achieve a national objective.

Linked to his treatment of protracted war is Sun Tzu’s theory of attrition warfare. He does not believe in war of attrition. Sun Tzu claims that those states who are proficient in waging war “do not require a second levy of conscripts nor more than one provisioning.”<sup>24</sup> Sun Tzu advocates attrition base warfare is extremely expensive; it devours resources measured in men, material, and morale. Sun Tzu believes this kind of war goes against the nation’s primary goal of survival and prosperity. According to Mark McNelly, Sun Tzu’s philosophy of “winning without fighting and avoiding attrition, use resources wisely and economically to achieve objectives”<sup>25</sup> not only supports his battle avoidance theory but also reinforces the goal of survival and prosperity for a nation.

Supporting Sun Tzu’s philosophies of a protracted war, war of attrition, deception, use of direct and indirect warfare, protecting a nation’s security, and achieve victory is the concept of Preemption. Preemption is not new and is intertwined in Sun Tzu’s theories. Sun Tzu advocates the principle that success can come from creating weakness in your adversary. It is an effective policy when your adversary has substantial material resources and you assume you cannot defeat it. But Sun Tzu claims “...that victory can be created - For even if the enemy is numerous, I can prevent him from engaging.”<sup>26</sup>

The Preemption Doctrine, although not novel has served effectively as the backbone of the United States National Security Strategy since 2002. The current policy as outlined in The United States National Security Strategy (2006) articulates “to forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defense.”<sup>27</sup> Currently, the Obama Administration is reviewing this doctrine with key leaders with the objective to modify or eliminate it as part of the future National Security Strategy. The President, however, should acknowledge that an accurately executed preemption strike can create a weakness which could be exploited by a nation’s hard or soft power to achieve its national objective. Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* stresses attacking the enemy’s weakness to achieve victory and preserve the nation’s resources. Likewise, leaders should not discard any means available to defeat his adversary. Leaders must assess the situation to fully know the enemy’s capabilities and intentions.

The Preemption Doctrine continually demonstrate its suitability to achieve the desired ends – protection of the homeland and of its citizens by preventing state and non-state actors from attacking the United States with horrific consequences. The Preemption Doctrine enables United States leaders to prevent attacks that can materialize in only a few days or even a few hours – whereas such threats formerly took months or even years to materialize. This limited reaction time makes preemption a necessity. Sun Tzu would agree that introducing preemption as a strategy could “fright[en] some state and non-state actors into rethinking the pluses and minuses of planning an attack against the United States, and providing support to terrorist groups”<sup>28</sup> If diplomacy fails and a nation must use military power, preemption allows the United



States to preserve its resources, refrain from a protracted war, avoid a war of attrition, by quickly defeating its adversary. The fact that the United States has not had any recurrence of the 9/11 attacks is testimony to the suitability of the Preemption Doctrine.

There can be little argument that in certain situations, particularly with regard to terrorism and piracy, preemption remains a viable option. “The evolution of modern weaponry and the nature of terrorism heighten the need for anticipatory self-defense.”<sup>29</sup> To avert such threats, the current administration should not eliminate this vital doctrine. The Obama Administration should “acknowledge the logic of the new strategy, that preemption does have a place in American foreign policy, both because it is part of history but also because others have come around to the same point of view: Preemption is a legitimate instrument of foreign policy.”<sup>30</sup> Sun Tzu would agree in order to achieve national objectives and protect vital interests; preemptive warfare is but one course of action. Sun Tzu’s maxims could be used to advise President Obama to retain preemption as part of his National Security Policy.

Traditional deterrence may no longer be possible. Formerly, time and distance afforded some protection for the United States homeland. Modern technology has removed these buffers which impact the nation’s security. The operational implications of new strategic approaches, along with international law, norms, and alliances, must evolve in a way that protects and defends populations while giving legitimacy to preemptive actions. Neglecting prospects of a complex attack with horrific consequences is strategically irresponsible. The United States must be ready to act with little warning when a threat becomes imminent. Sun Tzu would argue that to counter

terroristic threats, the United States could use preemptive measures to protect the homeland, its citizens and preserve its resources.

The theory of preemption is not a novel one. It continues to reemerge to meet the challenges and threats of today's VUCA environment. In Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, preemption supports his theory of using direct and indirect warfare, avoiding a war of attrition, preserve a nation's security, refrain from a protracted war, and to achieve victory. Sun Tzu would advocate that preemption is a viable option but should only be considered when the other element of soft power fails to prevent a war.

*Speed.* Augmenting Sun Tzu's theory of strategic battle plans is the use of speed. In war, speed is critical for achieving victory. Speed is relevant in the application of hard or soft power. Sun Tzu claims "speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; travel by unexpected routes and strike him where he has taken no precautions."<sup>31</sup> A nation can quickly start with a Diplomatic Strategy to convince an adversary that it cannot achieve its national objective if it continues down the path of aggression. If this deterrence fails, then a swift transition to a military strategy to achieve victory is imperative.

Speed in warfare provides four advantages: "it is a substitute for resources, it shocks and surprises the enemy, it is critical to exploiting weaknesses and opportunity, and it builds momentum."<sup>32</sup> Sun Tzu provides several examples to support this statement. He argues a leader should have the ability to develop situational awareness of the current state of affairs; develop a plan, and execute it swiftly to conserve resources. He continues by discussing the relationship between speed and exploiting opportunity to defeat his adversaries. A leader must reinforce success to achieve

strategic objectives. He must use speed to surprise the adversary, keep them off balance, and hide his true intentions. Lastly, speed enables a leader to maintain and exploit momentum either in the diplomatic campaign or in the military situation.

An example of the use of speed is Operation Iraqi Freedom. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Coalition forces quickly assaulted through their adversary, exploited opportunities to maintain their momentum toward their strategic objective of capturing Baghdad.

*Strategic Leadership.* “An Army leader is anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organization goals. [Leaders] motivate people inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization.”<sup>33</sup> This definition, as it applies to today’s development of leaders, could apply to anyone in the military from a squad leader to a division commander. Strategic leadership, however, is much more. The United States Army War College defines strategic leadership as “the process used by a leader to affect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive, and building consensus within a VUCA global environment which is marked by opportunities and threats.”<sup>34</sup> This definition effectively combines strategic leadership categories and competencies to conceptualize the role of a strategic leader.

In the VUCA environment, leaders must think in multiple dimensions; they must simultaneously consider time, politics, terrain, space, and national power. They must plan and act flexibly to adapt to change. A leader must not only know his capabilities but

the enemies' capabilities as well. Sun Tzu wrote at length about leader's competencies. He believed a leader "strikes only when the situation assures victory. He weighs the situation before he moves. He is prudent but not hesitant. He takes calculated risk but never needless ones and when he sees opportunity he acts swiftly and decisively"<sup>35</sup>

To defend the nation, achieve its goals and win the war, Sun Tzu believes a leader must have several key qualities. A successful leader must "have the right character, be able to motivate others, provide clear direction, have a sense of military and diplomatic genius, and work to make the nation stronger."<sup>36</sup> This is further illustrated by the following maximum: "And therefore the general who in advancing does not seek personal frame, and in withdrawing is not concerned with avoiding punishment, but whose only purpose is to protect the people and promote the best interest of his sovereign, is the precious jewel of the state."<sup>37</sup> A leader of this status is unique and hard to find. Sun Tzu believes "they are desirable because of their willingness to put the needs of the nation before their own; they have strong, well developed character."<sup>38</sup>

As stated earlier, Sun Tzu asserts that leaders must have certain traits and virtues to be successful. A few of these traits are wisdom, courage, discipline, and sincerity. Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership, discusses not only basic leadership traits and attributes but devotes an entire chapter on strategic leadership. The Manual cites traits and attributes are similar to those articulated by Sun Tzu. He advocates a leader must motivate his troops, lead by example, share his soldiers' trials, provide clear directions, and organize proper staffing of his organization. If leaders positively exhibit these characteristics, they will achieve victory on the battlefield.

Sun Tzu believes political leaders should not interfere with military leaders during the conduct of warfare. Instead, political leaders should delegate required authority to the commander so he can accomplish the mission. Sun Tzu recognizes the important relationship between politics and military affairs. Once political objectives are established, political leadership should leave the conduct of warfare to the military leaders. This sounds very workable in theory, but it is not easily practiced. Of course, this relationship depends largely on the decision-maker's own character and the constitutional civilian-military relationship. One can argue that the actions of Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld provide an example of civilian leadership interfering in the military commander's responsibility. Because of his leadership style – micromanager, he failed to allow the military commander to execute his responsibility in the planning and execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom. SECDEF Rumsfeld continued to make decisions below the strategic level affecting man power, capability, and time lines that finally affected morale, destroyed trust, and complicated relationships between the civilians and military. This failure led to future issues that prevented the United States military from setting the conditions for transition to a non-existent Phase IV of the operations in Iraq.

Sun Tzu's theories advocate that a leader must know himself as well as the enemy. This requirement for self-knowledge falls into both the strategic leadership and intelligence/deception arena. Regarding strategic leadership, Sun Tzu's reflections on strategic leaders' self-knowledge provides the foundation to the strategic leadership model taught at the United States Army War College. This model adds the trait of reflection, which enables a Senior Leader to think at a higher level when analyzing a

complex problem. This model encourages a leader to engage in certain techniques – critical thinking, creative thinking, thinking in time, systems thinking, and ethical thinking – to solve the complex problems at the strategic level. Although these exact works may not have existed during Sun Tzu's time, the idea clearly did. Sun Tzu clearly proclaimed in *The Art of War* that a leader must demonstrate the ability to think outside the box, to use his past experience, to think deeply, and to use all available means to defeat his enemy and thereby achieve the nation's strategic objectives. To be effective in the twenty-first century handling complex situations and problems, the United States military must continue instructing its Senior Leaders in the productiveness of this Strategic Thinking Model and ensure that future leaders are given the appropriate assignments to build the Sun Tzu's foundation for strategic leadership.

*Intelligence.* Sun Tzu placed special emphasis on intelligence. He clearly preferred human intelligence that is collected directly from the enemy. He devoted a separate chapter in his book to secret agents. "Of all those in the army close to the commander none is more intimate than the secret agent."<sup>39</sup> Sun Tzu believed that military leaders who successfully employ secret agents were more likely to succeed. "He is constantly probing the enemy for information using his agents to propagate confusion and mistrust in the enemy camp."<sup>40</sup> Without reliable human intelligence collection, Sun Tzu claims leaders fail on the battlefield and lose the war.

The 9/11 Commission Report cited lack of intelligence to be a tremendous weakness of the United States government. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the United States Intelligence Community started reducing its capabilities to meet current requirements. Due to budget reductions, eliminating human

contacts embedded into the camps of key current and future adversaries were the first to go. The intelligence community became dependent on technology to provide the information that human intelligence once provided. Whatever the reasons, a lack of creditable intelligence proves to be a betrayal of the nation, and its armed forces. Lack of intelligence places the population and military in great danger. Al-Qaeda's attack on the United States is an excellent example of this. Sun Tzu contends that one must know the enemy's capabilities, his potentials, and finally his intentions. In order to acquire this knowledge, one must inquire into these matters in the minutest detail. More specifically, this means putting spies on the ground to collect human intelligence.

Sun Tzu compellingly relates intelligence to the art of foreknowledge. Sun Tzu believes foreknowledge is the key to defeating the enemy and achieving the nation's objectives. Sun Tzu states "what is called foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits, not from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation."<sup>41</sup> To gain genuine foreknowledge, strategists must have a deep understanding of the enemy, his own capabilities and the environment. Today, this comprehensive knowledge could be compared to Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield- a time tested method to predict the enemy's situation.

Not only is the collection of human intelligence critical to success but also of equal importance is Sun Tzu's advocacy of deception. Not only must a nation gather information on their adversary but they must also prevent this information from falling into the adversary's hands. Sun Tzu argues that sponsor nations and leaders must protect or defend this critical information to the absolute end. The adversary must not know a nation's true intentions. When the enemy does not know his opponent's

intentions, the nation's chances of victory are high. But chances of victory declines proportionally when the enemy knows the opponent's intentions.

Deception also involves deceiving the opponent by attacking his mind. Sun Tzu believes that using accurate intelligence to bewilder an adversary enhances the chance of success by deceiving him into thinking something that is not true. *The Art of War* is fraught with examples of nations leaders to making their enemy believe the opposite of the truth and thereby misleading them into a false sense of security, and using this deception to set the conditions for either an attack or a strategic withdrawal.

In Sun Tzu's era, the intelligence collection methods were primarily through human observation of the enemy and obtaining critical information through the use of one of the five types of agents. These methods directly contributed to numerous victories on the battlefield throughout history. Although the United States has improved its intelligence collecting capabilities as well as sharing this intelligence with appropriate agencies and other nations, human intelligence collection still remains a key United States weakness. It will take time to hire either a local national to spy or recruit and train an individual in the art of intelligence collection. In order to ensure success and survivability in the twenty-first century, the United States must continue to make this a priority.

### Recommendations

Throughout time, the United States military has long implemented the principles of Sun Tzu in terms of its doctrine development and waging war. The current strategic environment requires United States leaders to be more adaptive, creative, and flexible as they confront today's complex problems, defend the nation's security, and achieve its national and strategic objectives.



To be successful in the twenty-first century, the United States must encourage the continuing employment of Sun Tzu's theories throughout the various levels of leadership. Consider the following suggestion:

- (1) Continue to intergrate Sun Tzu's noteworthy strategic theories in today's campaign plans to win the conflicts against an asymmetrical threat. Military strategist and policy makers must utilize the concept of distraction/decision forces (Chi and Cheng) and must consider both direct and indirect approaches; employment of hard and soft power; focused attack of an adversary's weakness; focused attack of the enemy's strategy. Likewise, they must avoid attrition-based warfare; avoid protracted wars; employ preemption strategy; disrupt or divide an adversary's alliances; and pursue victory without fighting a long battle to reduce costs and risks.
- (2) Introduce Sun Tzu's theories in the professional education system for senior military and civilian government leaders and encourage study of Sun Tzu to improve leader traits, values, and competencies. Senior Civilian leadership must know when to introduce their guidance to the military leaders. Senior Civilian leaders must develop a bond or trust with the military leadership and allow them the opportunity to develop plans to achieve the nation's strategic objectives. We must also continue introducing future military leaders to the current Strategic Thinking Model and teach them how to deal with complex problems.
- (3) The United States Intelligence Communities should continue to improve intelligence collection techniques by emphasizing human intelligence collection to regain intelligence superiority over our adversaries. National leaders must

provide adequate guidance and resources to the Intelligence Communities in order to unify their efforts in information collection, analysis, and sharing; improve collection capabilities; and reshape United States National Intelligence Policy. Additionally, national leaders must ensure friendly intelligence does not fall into the hands of our adversaries. Sun Tzu's concept of deception must be incorporated into all strategies. In order to ensure our nation's survival in the twenty-first century and beyond, the United States must place a high priority on intelligence improvement.

### Conclusion

Sun Tzu advanced his theory of war thousands of years ago, but military strategists continue to benefit from it. He analyzed all levels of warfare and provided guidance for winning all types of wars. He provided methods to study warfare, enabling strategist to think deeply and toughly. He did not prescribe rigid tex book rules of war. He offered leaders unique perspectives on war, strategy, leadership and intelligence. These are only four of many of Sun Tzu's themes and elegant theories. His theories are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. His theories are time-tested and applicable to warfare conditions today, Twenty-first century strategists should rely on Sun Tzu as their primary theorist.

### Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Cleary, *The Art of War: Complete Texts and Commentaries*(Boston, MA: Shambhala Publishing, Inc, 1988), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Woopidoo Biographies, Sun Tzu Biography, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press. Inc., 1963), x.

<sup>6</sup> Mark McNelly, *Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare* (New York, Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Tommy Franks, Part 3: Commander in Chief, in *American Soldier* (New Yor, NY: Haper Collins Publishers Inc., 2004), 203.

<sup>8</sup> Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*, v.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>12</sup> Cantrell, *Understanding Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, i.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (St. Paul, MN; Zenith Press, 2004), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Joint Staff J-7, Joint Publication 1-02, department of Defense Dictionary and Associated terms,( Washington, DC, Department of Defense, November 30, 2004), 509.

<sup>15</sup> Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy*, (Carlisle, PA, Strategic Studies Institute, February 2006), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> McNelly, *Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War* ,77-78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,73.

<sup>22</sup> Walter S. Zapotoczny, "Sun Tzu compared to Clausewitz", 2006, <http://wzaponline.com>, internet access 11 September 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

- <sup>25</sup> McNelly, Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare, 21.
- <sup>26</sup> Griffith, Sun Tzu: The Art of War, 100.
- <sup>27</sup> George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 2006), 18.
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